

2018-03-01

Empires of Print: Adventure Fiction in the Magazines, 1899-1919. By Patrick Scott Belk.

Finkelstein, David

<http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/15948>

10.1093/library/19.1.93

The Library

Oxford University Press (OUP)

All content in PEARL is protected by copyright law. Author manuscripts are made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the details provided on the item record or document. In the absence of an open licence (e.g. Creative Commons), permissions for further reuse of content should be sought from the publisher or author.

Empires of Print: Adventure Fiction in the Magazines, 1899–1919. By PATRICK SCOTT BELK. London: Routledge. 2017. xv + 247 pp. £105. ISBN 978 1 4724 4114 0 (hard-back); 978 1 315 56576 7 (e-book).

FOR BRITISH AND AMERICAN PUBLISHERS AND PERIODICAL PRODUCERS, the period 1880 to 1914 was one of great change and innovation. Shifts in technology enabled more sophisticated intertwining of print and visual media, with popular mass-media journals such as the *Illustrated London News* and the *Strand* (in the UK) and *Argosy*, *The Popular Magazine*, and *Munsey's Magazine* (in the US) becoming apt spaces for embedding appealing illustrations into serialized popular adventure tales and other mass-appeal genre works. The development of the telegraph as a transnational communication tool, the reuse of popular print works in stage productions and in the newly emerging silent movie industry of the early twentieth century, and the rise of the literary agent in negotiating rights and licensing agreements for authorial work, attested to the transformation of the media landscape of the period. By the turn of the twentieth century, authors were no longer involved in negotiating simple transfers of works from serialized publication in genteel literary monthlies to book publication and then cheap-format republication, but were enveloped within a larger transnational media ecosystem. Patrick Scott Belk explores what this meant for some key, successful navigators of this transformed landscape. He offers well-honed case studies on four major exponents operating during a period Roger Lancelyn Green dubbed the 'Age of the Storyteller', from the 1890s, when Joseph Conrad began publishing unsettling tales set in overseas spaces, up to the end of the First World War and John Buchan's publication of a clutch of adventure tales featuring the rugged British spy and adventurer Hannay, hero of *The 39 Steps* (1915), *Greenmantle* (1916), and *Mr Standfast* (1919).

The work is divided into five chapters, with the first offering an overview of late nineteenth-century periodical expansion in the UK and the US. As Belk points out, the rise of the adventure tale as an anchor in mass-audience periodicals in the Anglophone world coincided with a huge expansion in reading audiences and the technological means to publish and distribute press outputs faster, more efficiently, and in larger quantities. The number of periodical titles published in the UK, for example, rose from 2252 in 1875 to 7725 in 1922, while in the US numbers over corresponding years rose from 2402 to 10,986. This was accompanied by a global expansion of UK and American publishing activity into overseas English-speaking markets, with a corresponding demand for tales set in foreign lands. Belk is strong in his analysis of the factors that facilitate the rise of the popular magazine during this period, and offers a welter of statistics in useful appendices covering publication titles, serial rights payments, commercial statistics, copyright legislation, and pulp magazine circulation figures.

Similar details inform the four case studies that follow, focusing on the serialization of Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim* (1899), H. G. Wells's *Tono-Bungay* (1909), Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* (1912), and John Buchan's *The 39 Steps* (1915) and *Mr Standfast* (1919). Belk employs a blend of historical and book history inflected tools alongside standard literary critical analysis of content to survey how the material conditions of publication sat alongside textual themes covered by each author. In Conrad's case, Belk argues that the proto-modernist yet critical approach of Conrad sat well within the textual space of *Blackwood's Magazine*, the

conservative, anti-modernist monthly journal in which it was serialized. This is not a new argument, but it is set here to contrast with the manner in which Conrad's contemporaries would prove more sophisticated in their use of serialization both in the UK and the US to achieve commercial success, gain more exposure for their work, and grapple with themes incorporating the changing media landscape within which they worked. In *Tono Bungay* (1909), Wells incorporated into the plot the latest in media technology, while carefully directing the tale to serve different audiences in the US and the UK. Simultaneously serialized in the UK in *The English Review* (with a circulation of around 1000), and the US in *The Popular Magazine* (circulation around 300,000), the UK version differed from the US serialization in the way it featured philosophical ruminations later revised and truncated for US markets to highlight action and adventure.

Likewise, Conan Doyle's *Lost World* (1912), one of the most lucrative serialized works of his career, took advantage of UK and US publication differences to shape transnational responses to the work. Belk convincingly demonstrates how Doyle plays in the text with the idea of photography and documentary evidence shaping contemporary views of reality. These two chapters are the strongest in the volume, with Belk skilfully balancing textual analysis with analysis of the material conditions of their production and dissemination.

The last of the substantial case study sections focuses on Buchan's promotion of his series of tales starring Hannay the British spy and adventurer. Buchan was an indefatigable and expert negotiator of his work, drawing on his in-depth knowledge of the publishing industry gained as a director of the Edinburgh-based publishing firm Thomas Nelson and Sons, as well as on his links with transnational publishers such as the American firm Frank A. Munsey and Co., and the Street and Smith Corporation. His success in writing simultaneously for US pulp magazines and UK journals demanded a great deal of juggling, a feat ably explored by Belk.

Strong case studies underlie this work, but it would have benefited from some contextual examples drawn from contemporary female authors, as for example Ouida, bestselling author of *Under Two Flags*, or the 'Anglo-Indian' novelist Flora Annie Steel, both of whom were equally adept at managing transnational rights and commercial imperatives. The work's coda also seems somewhat undeveloped, despite some interesting material in hand. Nevertheless, much food for thought can be found in the material provided.